

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 LISBON 1925

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PO
SUBJECT: PORTUGUESE YOUTH: RETURNING TO THE TRADITIONAL
ROLE

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SUMMARY: AS DEMOCRATIC INSITITUTIONS BECOME MORE FIRMLY
IMPLANTED IN PORTUGAL, STUDENTS AT COIMBRA UNIVERSITY ARE
RETURNING TO TRADITIONAL POLITICAL ROLES. THE YOUTH
AFFILIATES OF THE DEMOCRATIC POLITICAL PARTIES SEE
THEMSELVES AS DISTINCT GROUPS CONCERNED WITH ISSUES AFFECTING
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STUDENTS AND YOUTH. IF THE TREND CONTINUES, DEMOCRATIC
STUDENT GROUPS WILL TEND INCREASINGLY TO DEFINE THEIR ROLES
AS PRESSURE GROUPS AGAINST THE ESTABLISHMENT. AS
CONSERVATIVE SENTIMENTS TAKE HOLD ON CAMPUS THIS WILL
INCREASINGLY MEAN PRESSURE ON THE GOVERNMENT FROM THE RIGHT
AS WELL AS THE LEFT. END SUMMARY.

1. STUDENTS BECOMING MORE CONSERVATIVE: IN A THREE-DAY VISIT MARCH 8-10 TO COIMBRA TO ASSESS STUDENT ATTITUDES EMBOFF TALKED WITH REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE YOUNG SOCIALISTS (JS), THE YOUNG SOCIAL DEMOCRATS (JSD), AND THE CDS-SPONSORED CENTRIST YOUTH (JC). IN CONTRAST TO THE HECTIC DAYS OF 1975 WHEN LEFTIST-LED NATIONAL POLITICS DOMINATED STUDENT THINKING AND ACTIVITIES, THE 1978 STUDENT BODY AT COIMBRA SEEMS FAR MORE CONCERNED WITH CAMPUS ISSUES AND ASSERTING ITS OWN IDENTITY:

-- APPEARANCES: WHILE SOME STUDENTS RETAIN BEARDS AND DRESS IN STYLES ASSOCIATED WITH LEFTIST LEADERS OF THE PORTUGUESE REVOLUTION, THE STUDENT BODY AS A WHOLE APPEARED STRIKINGLY WELL-DRESSED AND CLEAN CUT. MEMBERS OF THE JC LOOKED LIKE A WELL-SCRUBBED SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASS. THE YOUTH LEADERS WERE SERIOUS STUDENTS; MEETINGS WITH EMBOFF HAD TO BE SCHEDULED AROUND EXAMINATIONS. THE CAMPUS REFLECTED THE CHANGING TIMES; DESPITE RECENT STUDENT ELECTIONS, MOST OF THE POLITICAL GRAFFITI DATED FROM 1975 AND 1976.

-- NATIONAL ISSUES: AS POLITICAL ACTIVISTS, YOUTH LEADERS WERE AWARE OF NATIONAL ISSUES. BUT DISCUSSIONS OF SUCH NATIONAL TOPICS AS THE PS/CDS GOVERNMENT, THE ROLE OF THE PSD IN OPPOSITION, AND THE NECESSITY TO NEGOTIATE WITH THE IMF ELECITED ONLY ECHOS OF THE POLITICAL LINES OF THE NATIONAL PARTIES. STUDENTS WERE CONCERNED ABOUT THE ECONOMY, BUT EXPRESSED THAT CONCERN IN TERMS OF UNEMPLOYMENT AMONG YOUTHS AND THE CHANCES OF FINDING WORK AFTER GRADUATION. CONFIDENTIAL

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THE YOUTH LEADERS DISPLAYED LITTLE INTEREST IN ISSUES OF IMPORTANCE TO THE YOUTH OF OTHER COUNTRIES, SUCH AS WOMEN'S RIGHTS OR ECOLOGY.

-- STUDENT ISSUES: IN CONTRAST TO THEIR THINKING ON NATIONAL ISSUES, YOUTH LEADERS ENTHUSIASTICALLY DISCUSSED ISSUES OF TRADITIONAL CONCERN TO STUDENTS. THEY DEBATED AT LENGTH RECENT CAMPUS ELECTIONS. ALL YOUTH GROUPS, THE YOUNG SOCIALISTS INCLUDED, RAPED THE EDUCATION MINISTRY FOR INABILITY TO SOLVE PROBLEMS ON CAMPUS, FOR FAILURE TO PROCEED WITH REFORM, AND FOR INEFFICIENCY AND BUREAUCRATIC HARASSMENT. ALL GROUPS FELT TEACHERS HAD GOOD REASONS TO STRIKE (A ONE-DAY NATIONAL TEACHERS' STRIKE TOOK PLACE AS SCHEDULED MARCH 10).

-- STUDENTS ARE STUDENTS: IN THE WAKE OF THE PCP-SPONSORED SECOND NATIONAL WORKER-STUDENT MEETING IN LISBON MARCH 5, THE DEMOCRATIC YOUTH OUTSPOKENLY REJECTED ALLIANCES WITH OTHER SOCIAL GROUPS. ALL THOUGHT THAT STUDENTS HAVE A

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UNIQUE POSITION IN SOCIETY AND THAT THE CONCERNS OF YOUTH
CANNOT BE ADDRESSED ADEQUATELY BY ALLIANCES WITH
NON-STUDENTS. A JS MEMBER SAID, "OF COURSE, AS SOCIALISTS,
WE ARE CONCERNED ABOUT WORKER CAUSES. BUT WE ARE STUDENTS,
AND WE HAVE OUR OWN ROLE IN SOCIETY."

--THREAT PERCEPTIONS: BOTH THE JSD AND JC LEADERS SEE THE
COMMUNISTS AND THEIR SOMETIME FAR-LEFT ALLIES AS THE GREATEST
CURRENT THREAT TO PORTUGUESE DEMOCRACY. BOTH GROUPS
CONSIDERED THE FAR RIGHT AS WEAK AND DISORGANIZED AND
DISMISSED ANY THREAT FROM THE MILITARY. ONLY THE JS
LEADERSHIP THOUGHT A THREAT COULD COME FROM THE RIGHT.

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--FACING WEST: JSD, JC, AND JS REPRESENTATIVES UNIFORMLY
WANTED WESTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES, AND THE US IN PARTICULAR,
TO BE MORE ACTIVE IN CULTURAL EXCHANGE. ALL COMPLAINED THAT
THE WEST SEEMED TO BE ABANDONING CULTURAL ACTIVITIES ON THE

COIMBRA CAMPUS TO THE USSR AND EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES.

2. RELATIONSHIP WITH PARENT PARTIES: THE YOUNG AGRES OF NATIONAL PARTY LEADERS AND RELATIVELY EASY UPWARD MOBILITY WITHIN THE PARTIES TEND TO RESTRICT THE RANGE OF ACTIVITY OF NATIONAL PARTY YOUTH AFFILIATES. THE PS/CDS GOVERNMENT, THE YOUNGEST IN EUROPE, HAS SEVERAL MINISTERS AND STATE SECRETARIES IN THEIR EARLY THIRTIES, JUST ABOVE THE MANDATORY JS "RETIREMENT" AGE OF 30. ONE JS LEADER WITH WHOM EMBOFF SPOKE, A FIFTH-YEAR LAW STUDENT IN HSI MID-TWENTIES, HAS JUST BEEN TAPPED BY THE NATIONAL PARTY TO DIRECT AN INTERPARTY COMMISSION FOR PRESS RELATIONS. THE YOUTH AFFILIATES OF ALL THE PARTIES ARE AUTOMATICALLY REPRESENTED IN NATIONAL PARTY COMMITTEES, SOME ARE REPRESENTED ON EVEN HIGHER PARTY ORGANS. PARADOXICALLY, THE PRESENCE OF THE YOUTH AFFILIATES AT A HIGH LEVEL IN THE NATIONAL PARTIES SEEMED TO REINFORCE THE DESIRE OF THE YOUTH WINGS TO DEFINE THEMSELVES AS ENTITIES DISTINCT FROM THE NATIONAL PARTIES. BOTH THE JS AND JC ACCEPTED THE GOVERNMENTAL AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE PARENT PARTIES. BUT LEADERS OF BOTH STATED THAT THE NATIONAL UNDERSTANDING HAD NO IMPLIED RELATIONSHIP AT THE YOUTH LEVEL, AND BOTH YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS REFUSED TO CONSIDER A COALITION SLATE FOR UNIVERSITY STUDENT ELECTIONS. THE DESIRE OF YOUTH GROUPS TO BE DISTINCT ORGANIZATIONS SEEMED TO REINFORCE THE INTEREST IN STUDENT RATHER THAN NATIONAL ISSUES, AND TENDS TO MAKE THE YOUTH WINGS DIRECT RECRUITMENT AND ORGANIZATION EFFORTS TOWARD HIGH-SCHOOL STUDENTS. BOTH THE JSD AND JC CLAIMED SUCCESS IN BUILDING HIGH SCHOOL CONSTITUENCIES.

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3. POLITICAL BALANCE ON CAMPUS: RECENT ELECTIONS IN THE COIMBRA ACADEMIC ASSOCIATION, REPORTED REFTTEL, ILLUSTRATE THE GROWING CONSERVATIVE TREND AMONG THE STUDENT BODY. THE ASSOCIATION, THE OLDEST AND MOST PRESTIGIOUS IN PORTUGAL, HAS LITTLE CLOUT ON CAMPUS. BUT BECAUSE OF ITS TRADITIONS AND A MEMBERSHIP DRAWN FROM ALL THE FACULTIES, POLITICAL LEADERSHIP OF THE ASSOCIATION IS EAGERLY SOUGHT BY YOUTH PARTIES. IN ELECTIONS HELD IN LATE FEBRUARY, THE JS VOTED WITH THE COMMUNIST AND FAR-LEFT UEC SLATE TO DENY VICTORY TO THE JSD. BUT THE JSD AND JC PRESENTED SLATES FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THESE ELECTIONS, AND BOTH MADE IMPRESSIVE SHOWINGS. JSD LEADERS ARE CONFIDENT THAT THEY WILL WIN NEXT YEAR BECAUSE OF AN INFLUX OF A MORE CONSERVATIVE FRESHMEN CLASS AND BECAUSE THE MEMORIES OF THE COMMUNIST/FAR-LEFT EXCESSES OF 1975 ARE MUCH FRESHER THAN FADING RECOLLECTIONS OF LIFE UNDER SALAZAR. THEY MAY BE RIGHT.

4. IMPRESSIONS: EMBOFF WAS STRUCK BY THE SIMILARITIES BETWEEN

EACH OF THE YOUTH GROUPS AND ITS NATIONAL PARENT:

--THE JS MIRRORED THE OPTIMISM AND THE TACTICAL SAVVY OF THE SOCIALISTS NATIONALLY. LIKE THE PS, THE JS SEES ITSELF AS THE BALANCER OF POLITICAL FORCES. THE JS, LIKE ITS MENTOR, EMBRACES A LARGE SPECTRUM OF POLITICAL OPINION, ALTHOUGH THE JS IS MORE LEFTIST THAN ITS PARENT. BUT UNLIKE THE NATIONAL PARTY, THE JS HAS NOT BEEN ABLE TO CONTAIN DIFFERENCES OF OPINION AND MAINTAIN PARTY UNITY. THE EXPULSION OF LEFT WING DISSIDENTS FROM THE JS PRODUCED DEEP DIVISIONS, REDUCED ITS EFFECTIVENESS AS A POLITICAL VEHICLE, AND DIMINISHED ITS APPEAL TO SUTDENTS.

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--THE JC REFLECTED THE TRAUMATISM VISITED ON THE PARENT PARTY DURING THE HEYDAY OF LEFTIST INFLUENCE IN COIMBRA. IT GINGERLY STUCK ITS NECK OUT TO RUN A SLATE IN THE ASSOCIATION ELECTIONS, AND WAS HAPPILY SURPRISED TO FIND THAT, NOT ONLY DID ITS HEAD REMAIN INTACT, BUT IT SCORED RELATIVELY WELL. BUT JC MEMBERS, SLIGHTLY YOUNGER IN GENERAL THAN THOSE OF THE OTHER YOUTH AFFILIATES, DO NOT YET REFLECT THE POLITICAL

WISDON MANIFESTED BY NATIONAL CDS LEADERS. THEY TENDED TO
CAST MOST ISSUES IN COMMUNIST VERSUS DEMOCRATIC TERMS.
INCREASED GUIDANCE FROM THE CDS AND MORE EXPERIENCE ON THE
POLITICAL BATTLEFIELD WOULD STRENGTHEN THE JC.

--JSD MEMBERS REFLECTED THE UNCERTAINTY OF THE PSD
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OPPOSITION ROLE. JSD MEMBERS DO NOT YET KNOW WHERE THE
PSD "SELECTIVE OPPOSITION" STRATEGY WILL TAKE THE PARENT
PARTY AND THEMSELVES, AND ARE STILL TRYING TO GET THEIR
SIGNALS STRAIGHT. ONE JSD MEMBER, ASKED TO GIVE HIS OPINION
OF THE CDS AGREEMENT TO JOIN THE PS IN THE GOVERNMENT,
OBVIOUSLY MISSING HIS CUE, SAID THE CDS "HAD DONE ITS PATRIOTIC
DUTY."

LIKE THE PSD, JSD LEADERS EXPRESSED SUPPORT FOR THE PARTY SYSTEM.
BUT ONE JSD MEMBER TOLD EMBOFF THAT WHAT PORUTGAL REALLY NEEDED
WAS A HERO. THE COUNTRY HAD ALWAYS HAD A STRONG LEADER, HE SAID,
AND THE PEOPLE WERE HAPPIEST WHEN THEY HAD ONE. NEITHER THE SPEAKER
NOR ANY OF HIS COLLEAGUES PRESENT THOUGHT THERE WAS ANY
DICHOTOMY BETWEEN THE TWO THOUGHTS. THE DESIRE FOR A STRONG
LEADER PROBABLY REFLECTS THE DEEP CONSERVATISM OF THE PSD
CONSTITUENCY MORE THAN IT DOES UNDEMOCRATIC TENDENCIES.

5. CONCLUSIONS: DEMOCRATIC YOUTH IN COIMBRA MANIFEST A CONTINUATION
OF THE TREND BEGUN IN LATE 1976 OF A RETURN OF STUDENTS TO
THEIR TRADITIONAL POLITICAL ROLE. THEY SEE THEMSELVES
AS DISTINCT GROUPS CONCERNED WITH ISSUES AFFECTING STUDENTS
AND YOUTH. IF THE TREND CONTINUES, DEMOCRATIC STUDENT GROUPS
WILL TEND INCREASINGLY TO DEFINE THEIR ROLES AS PRESSURE GROUPS
AGAINST THE ESTABLISHMENT. AS CONSERVATIVE SENTIMENTS TAKE HOLD
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